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SIDE-LIGHTS ON OLD LOS ANGELES

BY MARY E. MOONEY.

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The modern resident in the City of the Angels has seen in the past fifteen years, the many and sweeping changes wrought by industry and capital and brains, which have transformed a sleepy little Spanish-Mexican pueblo into our modern, bustling and up-to-date metropolis. So that if a Fundador were to rise from his tomb, under the floor of la Mission, Nuestra Senora la Reyna de los Angeles, and take a pasear over the city, there would be few localities his shade would recognize. The church and the Plaza, and a part of what is now Chinatown, and old Sonoratown, and an occasional ruined adobe—these would be all. He would look for his caballero paisanos of the olden days, with their great white beaded sombreros, the caballos decked out in "frenos de puro plata," and urged on by sharp-pointed "espuellas" of the same white metal. And he would look for them in vain, and in vain! The Fundadores were several poor families, brought from Mexico by the government to found a town on the plains, westward three leagues from the Mission San Gabriel Arcangel. Though of poor and humble station in their native land, they were courageous and cheerful, as befits pioneers of any race or clime to be. This paper does not pretend to treat of the Spanish families of rank and wealth, which early settled in and near the old pueblo; but only of the fortunes of some of the original founders, and their descendants. Of the latter, was Cayetano Barelás, one of the earliest settlers in la calle Buena Vista. His mother, born Anita Galinda y Pinta, came from Mexico, as a Fundadores, with the original party. She was Ana Galinda y Pinta when, in her native Sinaloa, she married Ignacio Barelás. At the same time came the Abila family, Santa Ana Abila, and Ysabel Urquidez de Abila, his wife. They came from a place called El Fuerte, and were styled Fuertenos. They brought with them the following children: Antonio Ignacio, Francisco, Jose Maria, Anastasio, Bruno and Cornelio, all boys; and these girls—Alfonsa, Augustina, and Ylaria, a nursing babe. Ylaria was the grandmother, on the maternal side, of Dona Teresa Sepulveda de Labory, at present re-

siding on Boyle Heights. This lady was well known by the poblanos of early days, and is still hale and hearty despite her seventy-three years, and the many vicissitudes of family and fortune, that they have brought her. Her only son is a mining man, residing in the city. He is married to an American lady and they have a large family of sons and daughters. So here we have a direct and unbroken chain, of two families of founders, down to the present day. And Dona Teresa, who is a naturally bright woman, can narrate off hand, all the events of importance in her family, on both the Barelás and Abila sides. There were others who came with these two families, and figured as founders. It is said that these families brought grapes, tunas, grandas or pomegranates, and other fruits, which they distributed at different missions on their way to their destination, Santa Barbara. They removed from there after a time, to the Pueblo, "Nuestra Señora la Reyna de Los Angeles." The house of Cayitano Barelás stood in about the center of the present old Catholic cemetery on Buena Vista street and was of adobe. In the year 1825 it sheltered three generations of the Barelás family, viz: Ignacio Barelás and his wife Ana, Cayetano and his wife and their children. Cayetano and his wife each had many brothers and sisters, all of whom were married and had from ten to twenty children in each family. The cactus and tunas they brought from Mexico are still to be seen, in and near the old missions. The indigenous cacti have a small red fruit, and attain but to a scrubby growth. The Mexican or cultivated varieties are tall and graceful, producing a red and yellowish pear, delicious to the taste. The natives were very fond of the fruit, and besides, the cacti when properly set out, made perfect corrals for the protection of the fine cattle of the missions.

Although the histories of those early times mention but few names of Spanish settlers, the decendants of the pobladores strenuously declare, that soon after the founding, there were many whole families of Spanish descent, in the pueblo, or settled on some of the adjacent ranchos. Almost the first thing they erected was the capilla, or chapel, small, and of the old Dutch mudhouse style. It stood on the side of the hill, just directly back of the present mission church, (and the ruins of it were still to be seen in quite recent years.) The roof was thatched with tule, and over that, coarse grasses and mud, and it is just possible that it was topped with a layer of brea, which was plentiful in certain localities. There was a lack of hardware in finishing the "jacales" of those days; also a lack of lumber. The small window had neither sash

nor glass. The door often consisted of a dried hide hung over the opening. Oftener it was made of willow, or elder branches, laced together with thongs of leather or rabbit hide, and a leather string was used to fasten it on the inside. Everything in the house was necessarily of the most primitive sort. The table was a rude board, supported by notched stakes, stuck into the earth floor. Bancos, or benches, made in a similar way, served as seats. Whatever was lacking in utility or elegance, was more than compensated for in appetite and good cheer. The cooking utensils were of stone and were brought from the Coast islands. Pots, ollas and metates were made from the two kinds of stone, *piedra-azul* and *mal-pais*. Vessels were made from *piedra-azul* were most highly prized for their durability. They had also clay ollas and coras or baskets brought from Mexico.

Speaking of furniture, the bed of those days consisted of sort of rude stretcher, made of willow or elder saplings, set down in a corner of the room, resting a couple of inches above the earth floor. This was heaped with dry grasses, and covered over with a dry hide. In some houses there were a few coarse blankets, the gifts of the missions. Others boasted of a seat, called a *pretil*, which was of adobe, built around the walls of the corridor or dining room.

In the year of 1825, the children of the poorer families played around Buena Vista street, clad in a skirt, or *tunico*, to the knee, and made of strips of tanned rabbit skin, sewn together. The other sole garment was a *camisa*, of unbleached muslin. The food of the time consisted of *verdolade*, (vulgarly called pig-weed), made into a salad, *frijoles*, *mais*, *lenteja*, *esquita*, or parched corn, cooked as a much. *Atole* was made from corn flour, by grinding corn in a *metate*, then straining through a basket seive. It was then cooked as a mush, and it is doubtful if the manufacturers of modern cereal foods can produce anything to equal it in flavor or quality. But *carne* (beef) was the most relished, as well as the most important, article of food. "*Pulpa la carne* meant cut and dried beef. There were not wanting experts in the art of cooking fresh meats. Rump steak was called *pulpas*. "*Un tasajo de carne*" was a strip off the loin. There was tea (*cha*) brewed from a native wild herb. Also sugar and chocolate, but no coffee. Cabbages were a favorite vegetable, and known in the vernacular as "*las colas*." Garlic, and the fiery chile (pepper), together with *cavorjas* or onions and tomatoes, cut quite an important figure in the stew-pots of those olden days, and at the present time they have lost little, if any, of their old-time popularity. The *Fundadores* were

treated with the greatest respect by their families and friends. Grace was said before and after meals, and each child kissed the grandfather's extended hand before taking his or her place, around the board.

The marriage ceremony was most interesting. The novios knelt side by side at the altar rail, upon which rested lighted blessed candles. On either side knelt the padrino and the madrina, or sponsors. The bride if a young girl, wore either a pink or blue dress with white over-dress, and a long white veil. If a widow, or in mourning, (*enlutada*), a black dress and veil of the same color, was the correct thing. Marriage was solemnized in the churches, in Quaresma, or lent, but in La Semane Santa (holy week), there was no "*belanda*." So it was customary for couples married during holy week to go to the church, some time during the following week, and have that part of the ceremony performed. During the marriage ceremony, a silver plate rested on the altar rail. In contained the two wedding rings, which the priest blessed and placed on the wedding finger of bride and groom. It also held the *sarras* or money gift, from the groom to the bride, and was generally six silver dollars, and sometimes twelve. A nuptial mass followed the marriage ceremony, through all of which the novios knelt, covered from shoulder to shoulder, with a large silk handkerchief, which the priest placed over them as a token of their union in matrimony. The following is said to have been part of the form: Priest asks: Anna, do you take Don J., here present, to be your husband and companion? And to the groom: J. do you take this girl, Anna, to be your wife and companion? It is related of a beautiful daughter of the Vilas family, that she replied no, father, at the critical moment, causing momentary consternation in the crowded church. But her sister, who was the bridesmaid, came to the rescue by saying, "Well, if you won't take him, I will." As the groom was not lacking in gallantry, the ladies changed places and the ceremony proceeded without further interruption. There were no church organs in the earliest days, but violins, guitaros and other stringed instruments, furnished the choral music. As the wedding party left the church, old muskets were fired off in salute, and the people went dancing and singing along the road, to the wedding festival, which was always as good as the times afforded, and often lasted for a week. Altogether the Fundadores and their descendents were a remarkably happy and cheerful people, and made the most of the few diversions that came into their lives, in those lonely, early days. They often made merry at the funerals

of small children. For instance, a funeral going from Los Angeles to San Gabriel Mission, while most of the people walked, a few of the men rode horses, and at intervals, when tired walking, the women and children rode in the carretas, drawn by oxen. At convenient points along the road, the bearers laid down their burden and all rested. Then some of the merrier members of the party, danced and sang the humorous "versos" of the period. At San Gabriel a temporary brush house or ramada, was ready for the beloria, or wake. Some of the people sang hymns and prayed through the long hours of the night, while others were being entertained by friends amongst the Gabrielenos. The next morning the "Misa de Los Angeles" was chanted by priest and choir, and after mass, followed the interment in the old churchyard. Next the Angelenos were dined by the Gabrielenos, before starting back for the Pueblo.

There is current a tradition of a great flood in 1826. It is said to have rained at intervals for forty days. What was at first a mild drizzle, toward the last became a heavy, steady downpour, until the flood waters turned the city streets into a lake. By this time the booming of the river so terrified the people, that they took to the hills, where the high school is now. An awful cloudburst above the Arroyo Seco added force and volume to the already raging, roaring river, which, amidst blinding rain and fearful thunder suddenly broke its banks and rushed around the southeastern part of what is now the city, until it dashed against the bluff, on which is now built the Hollenbeck Home. When the waters had receded it was seen that the river's course had changed. Its former channel was through Alameda and out Figueroa streets, but in that awful flood its bed filled with rocks and sand, and the swift flowing currents soon were adjusted to other, and lower levels. After this flood many of the people moved from the Pueblo to the beautiful heights which they named el Paredon Blanco, or the white bluff. The name was changed after the American occupation, to that of Boyle Heights. It is said that Petra Rubio, y Barelás, a great aunt of Dona Teresa Sepulveda de Labory, was the first settler in el Paredon Blanco. She had some land from the government and set it to vines. She made wine and sold it to the missions. She was born Petra Barelás and was the daughter of Anna Casimira, an original founder of the Pueblo de Los Angeles. Another member of this family was a sort of Amazon. She cultivated large fields of corn and grain near San Bernardino, and brought her produce to Los Angeles, in the two-wheeled carretas,

drawn by "bueys." Petra built the first adobe house on Boyle Heights. It had four large rooms and a corridor, supported by large pillars of adobe. Around the halls of comedor and corridor, ran the adobe pretil. Anna, the mother of Petra, died in 1836 in this house, and was given an imposing funeral. Her shroud was a monk's habit of grey cloth, with a hood of the same, and fastened around the waist with a grey cord. It had been sent her, long before her death, from the mission of Santa Barbara, as a mark of respect, and in recognition of her labors as a founder. The priest and acolytes came to the house on the bluff to officiate. Her body, wrapped in its shroud had laid on the bare earth all night, with an adobe brick for a pillow. When services had been held at the house, the funeral started, strong men carrying the stretcher and corpse, aloft on their shoulders. Along the road passed the procession, priest and people chanting and singing in Spanish the Penitential psalms. Arrived at the church, solemn mass for the dead was sung, and everything was in readiness for the interment. The churchyard was at the left side of, and back of the church Nuestra Senora la Reyna de los Angeles, and the gate was just to the left of the front entrance. This was the oldest cemetery in the pueblo. But the ashes of Anna, the founder, were destined for higher honor than a grave in the churchyard, for just inside the baptistry they had dug her a deep, last resting place. Her son received the body as it was lowered by means of riatas; and lastly arranged it and covered the face with the monk's hood. Then he ascended and helped to fill the grave. There were no coffins or trappings, just "dust to dust," and Anna Casimira de Galinda y Barelás was left to sleep her last sleep. She was the last lay person buried under the church floors. And the scenes have changed. The funeral cortege of today mostly wends its solemn way to the Campo Santo, on the plains beyond El Paredon Blanco.